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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the underlying political and institutional theories that policymakers are embracing as they approve of new mayoral takeovers of public schools, discussing what has fostered this recent governance change that reverses the century-old progressive effort to remove mayors from school governance. Some of the reasons for mayoral takeover include bureaucratic dysfunction, decreasing faith in urban school boards, a push toward accountability, and new demands placed on mayors and urban governments as a result of diminished federal funds for urban areas and changing urban coalitions. Some of the different models being used in cities around the U.S. are described. The paper also examines reasons why policymakers in Boston, Massachusetts and Chicago, Illinois, as well as in other cities, have been interested in giving more power to mayors. Finally, the paper examines some of the early changes that resulted from the governance changes in Boston and Chicago and discusses the future of mayoral control. (Contains 32 references.) (SM)

## Mayoral Takeover: The Different Directions Taken in Different Cities

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# Mayoral Takeover: The Different Directions Taken in Different Cities<sup>1</sup>

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Changes in American big-city school governance often focus on reforming a prior reform. At the turn-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century, “progressive” reformers wanted to overcome excessive decentralization caused by ward-based school boards of 50 to 100 members, and corruption from mayoral influence in teacher hiring - the symbol of city government in 1900 was Tammany Hall in New York City (Tyack, 1974). The committee system, often large and unwieldy, provided opportunities for extensive and complex political influence.

The solution to this alleged excess of representation was to install a nonpartisan school superintendent — hence the turn toward executive leadership and neutral competence (Tyack, 1974). By 1910, the conventional educational wisdom among school leaders, as well as among leading business and professional men, was that smaller boards in conjunction with professional superintendents who would select teachers and work with certified administrators to create a uniform city-wide curriculum was the solution. The watchwords of reform during this era became *centralization, expertise, professionalism,*

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*nonpolitical control*, and *efficiency*, all of which would inspire "the one best system" (Tyack, 1974). The governance structure rooted in ward-based committees needed to be revised so that schools would operate "above politics." To achieve this, school boards had to be small, elected at large, and freed from all connections with political parties and regular government officials such as mayors and councilmen. School districts in this new design would raise their own property taxes so as to not become fiscally dependent on city hall. Mayors were seen as part of a discredited inefficient corrupt regime that did not fit with the industrial model of governance in which the school superintendent was a CEO.

It was not until the 1960's that this Progressive Era governance pattern was challenged as undemocratic and not sufficiently representative of minorities because of its focus on citywide representation. There was a partial reversion to the earlier pattern of electing school boards from geographic sub-districts of the city and tighter board oversight of the superintendent. Unions became omnipresent, major players in board elections, and voluminous collective bargaining agreements grew annually. In the 1970's, some cities adopted models of administrative decentralization, consisting of area superintendents for sub-districts within a city. New interest groups created a political pluralism that represented such interests as handicapped, bilingual, disadvantaged, and gifted pupils. Boards responded to these multiple governance pressures, superintendent turnover accelerated, and the era of the administrative chief ended. Alongside these changes, the conditions of children deteriorated into massive poverty.

From 1960 to 1995 some large cities like Chicago and Philadelphia preserved a role for the mayor in appointing school board members. As city school performance stagnated across nationally, various governance prescriptions, such as sub-area decentralization and

weakly implemented school-based management, failed to improve performance. In some cities, school board members increasingly saw their role as redistributing school jobs and contracts to benefit residents in the geographic slice of the city that they represented.

From the late 1960s, mayors (including Lindsey of New York City and Cavanaugh of Detroit) became increasingly concerned that city economies could not be improved substantially without good schools and middle class children. However, these mayors hesitated to seek control of the schools, because they feared that there would not be enough school improvement to justify their re-election. Similar to Italian and Irish mayors earlier in the century, new African-American mayors such as Washington in Chicago and Young in Detroit focussed during the 1980's in part on redistributing school jobs and services to minority communities (Beinert, 1997).

The 1990's produced a 180 degree reversal of the negative 1900-1920 mayoral Tammany image. Many mayors projected an image of efficient public managers who were less interested in redistributing jobs, and more interested in improved services. Some mayors argued that city hall needed to provide more integrated and coherent public services, including those directed at children. Anti-union Republican state legislatures in Illinois, Michigan and Ohio were ready to cut back the influence of teacher unions and elected urban school boards that faced repeated financial crises. Education reformers stressed that a chum of new policies with each new superintendent created lots of policy wheel spinning, but little change in educational achievement (Hess, 1999).

Consequently, the long-standing independence of the schools from city hall has recently been re-examined in some of the nation's major cities where policy makers, often with the support of the electorate, are putting the mayor in charge or enhancing mayoral

power. Chicago, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., Oakland, Harrisburg, PA and Cleveland have all moved in this direction, while other cities like Rockford, Illinois, and New Orleans are discussing it. And, even without substantial formal changes in governance structures, mayors in cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Milwaukee, exert much more influence over school policy than their predecessors did. In this power shift, school boards are the big losers. Mayors increasingly make major decisions that were the province of the school board, including the selection of superintendents in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and Cleveland.

In the first section of this paper, we examine the underlying political and institutional theories policy makers are embracing as they approve these new mayoral regimes. What has fostered this recent governance change, reversing the century-old progressive effort to remove mayors from school governance? The second section described some of the different models being used in cities around the nation. In the third section, we focus on the reasons why policy makers in Boston and Chicago, as well as other cities, have been interested in giving more power to mayors. The final section examines some of the early changes that resulted from the governance changes in Boston and Chicago, and provides an introduction to the case studies of these two cities that follows this chapter.

### **THE MAYORS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHOICE**

In the 1980s and 1990s, frustration mounted in many cities regarding the state of public education, and especially the governance of the city school systems. Policy makers responded by investigating different institutional choices to address the perceived problems. The concept of "institutional choice" focuses on the crucial policy decision of which institution(s) should be the key policy decision maker(s), and what authority should

be vested in different institutional actors (Clune, 1987; Plank & Boyd, 1994). As Plank and Boyd note, "The politics of institutional choice is preeminently concerned with 'deciding who will decide' about issues of public policy" (Plank & Boyd, 1994, p. 265).

New institutional choices have a long history at all levels of U.S. government. For example, courts were reluctant in 1960-1985 to delegate civil rights protection to the institution of local school districts in Mississippi. The 1983-1993 state education reform movement included an institutional choice to enhance the curricular and testing role of state government. Another type of institutional choice is whether to place various functions in the hands of markets (e.g., vouchers) or politics (e.g., school board elections) (Chubb & Moe, 1990). The institutional choices that are made may reflect concerns about policy goals, the ability of the existing system to address goals, and the relative political power of various actors. In most cases, however, institutional choices are due to a combination of policy and political forces (Komesar, 1994).

Institutional choice is complex, uncertain, and subject to continual political change. The balance of control in education will never be settled by policy makers making a purely logical analysis, but is rather part of a series of evolving political bargains and changing perceptions about the capacity of alternative institutions. In selecting the mayor as the primary institutional actor in education, policy makers implicitly assert that mayors are capable of making the changes needed to improve school performance. Moreover, they are making a choice to decrease the influence of school boards — boards that are often seen as incapable of making necessary changes and/or as having different substantive goals than the policy makers who decide institutional arrangements.

### ***WHY MAYORAL TAKEOVER?***

There are a number of different reasons for the shift to mayoral takeover of the public schools, including bureaucratic dysfunction, decreasing faith in urban school boards, and new demands placed on mayors and urban governments as a result of diminished federal funds for urban areas and changing urban coalitions. In addition, mayors were both under more pressure to address educational problems, and more interested in increasing their power in the public schools.

#### *Bureaucratic Dysfunction*

During the years 1890-1920, progressive reformers operated on the assumption that professional bureaucracy would guarantee efficiency, accountability, and neutrality. However, considerable research has suggested that professional hierarchies, despite claims to the contrary, are not politically neutral because different ways of organizing school bureaucracies necessarily bias allocations of scarce school revenues in favor of particular outcomes (Knott & Miller, 1987, suggest this about bureaucracies in general). Critics argue that professional bureaucracy often leads to the very inefficiency and unaccountable political power that reformers had sought to eradicate in the first place. Professional education bureaucracies can create unanticipated consequences and tensions between hierarchy and specialization, and between written rules and reliance on expertise (Wirt & Kirst, 1997). The inability of dysfunctional city education systems even to provide adequate school facilities was illustrated in a 1997 analysis of Washington, D.C. (Perl & Wilgoren, 1997).

Ironically, this sad current state of affairs can be seen as the legacy of reforms enacted at the turn of the century by progressives who favored the executive centralization model.

This model hindered the flexible responses that education requires, generating instead the red tape associated with rigidity and dysfunction. At the school level, bureaucratic routines often become a way to protect bureaucratic authority and to deal with inadequate resources, but this often occurs at the expense of innovation and productivity. Goal displacement spreads as bureaucratic procedures replace educational goals. Bureaucracy may create "trained incapacity," or an inability to think beyond narrow specialized roles (Knott & Miller, 1987, p. 119).

Electoral mechanisms of popular control, including those involving school board members, are predicated on the assumption that officials voted into office are in full command of policy and program, and that other components of governmental machinery are little more than executors of their collective will. But the control by the educational bureaucracy and fragmented political power in cities like Chicago and Boston undermined the Progressive model — no one seemed to have real command over systems perceived as spiraling out of control. Reformers in the 1990's have contended that it took the mayors to restore the central executive accountability element of the Progressive model (Rich, 1996). The perception of a lack of control by existing boards was exacerbated in Boston by the School Committee's behavior. Specifically, the School Committee was often seen as a disorganized and fractious entity that engaged frequently in fights both internally and externally (especially with various mayors). Boston superintendents criticized the Committee for having an excess of staff, and for becoming too involved in the details of management and personnel.

During the 1980's integrating children's services became more of a priority. Many analysts stressed that the 1900-1920 separation of schools from city government hindered

services coordination and the ability of educators and city officials to use school sites as one-stop centers for services. The hope has been that mayors might be able to overcome fragmentation of services better than school systems (Kirst & McLaughlin, 1990).

Federal/state grants exacerbated this independence of school systems from central leadership. Categorical grants like special and vocational education created vertical bureaucracies from local educators to the federal and state grant-making units. A 1995 study of Detroit, Gary and Newark found that attempts by mayors to influence schools were thwarted by a cartel of educational administrators, teachers, school boards, and community activists (Rich, 1996). Moreover, the dispersal of local power to non-elected bureaucrats has made it extremely difficult for low-income people to influence policy. In short, Progressives in 1900-1920 cleaned up big city corruption, but may have destroyed the basis for sustained central, popularly-based action and mayoral accountability in education policy (Goldberg, 1995). A recent study of Los Angeles demonstrates that problems with bureaucracy are not confined to the older eastern and mid-western cities (Portz, 1996).

### *Diminishing Faith in Existing Structures*

Another explanation for large-scale city school governance changes is the perception that there is a "major operational failure" in the existing system, diminishing support for the existing governance system (Allison, 1971). Cibulka argues that dismal performance and negative publicity of big city education has undermined the legitimating values upon which the old governance structure was built (Cibulka, 1997). Prior to the 1995 legislation that gave the mayor more power over schools, the Chicago school district, for example, had considerable negative publicity due to frequent teachers' strikes and budget deficits that

often led to schools not opening at the expected time. As Easton put it, the failing political system in Chicago lost its "diffuse support" (Easton, 1965). One effect of this diminishing support may be increased in-fighting and dissension among school board members, such as that found prior to mayoral takeover in Chicago and Boston (Portz, 1996). Media reports of dismal test scores and school violence also undermined the legitimacy of the old regimes.

### *The Accountability Push*

During this period when there has been increasing interest in mayoral control, there has also been a push for greater accountability in public education. This focus on accountability is linked to concerns about bureaucratic dysfunction and the overall diminishing faith in public education in large cities.

Reformers in both Boston and Chicago were particularly concerned with issues of accountability. The primary goal in both cases was to establish clearer lines of political authority and responsibility, making the city's mayor ultimately accountable for the progress of the public schools. The logic was in keeping with Cibulka's description of "political integration," which is "premised on the notion that the policy works most effectively where there are clear and direct lines of accountability from public elected officials to the public" (Cibulka, 1997, p. 322).

In Boston, the purpose of moving from an elected School Committee to an appointed one, Yee argues in this volume, was "to clearly identify who was responsible for improving the schools and to 'take the politics out of schools.'" Despite arguments of Progressive Era reformers decades earlier, the direct election of board members was perceived as

increasing the political nature of the School Committee. Similarly, Illinois legislators sought a system in which the mayor would be accountable for the schools. In addition, reform supporters, including the mayors, in both cities were concerned about the on-going flight of middle class white (and to a lesser extent, minority) families from their cities and their city's public schools. They hoped that the mayors would use their newfound power over the schools to reverse this long-term trend.

### *New Demands*

In addition to both real and perceived problems in urban education, new pressures have been placed on urban governments that can impact school governance structures. As Beinert points out, two of these added pressures have come from lessened federal aid and changing racial coalitions (Beinert, 1997). In recent years, federal aid to cities has declined drastically. This has put increased pressure on urban governments to compensate for diminishing federal support for children's services, spurring frequent school budget shortfalls in cities such as Chicago and Boston where schools are dependent on the city treasury for funds (see U.S. Conference of Mayors, 1994).

Also, loss of public tolerance for large city employee costs has occurred as the traditional civil rights coalitions have disintegrated (Beinert, 1997). Alliances of Democratic mayors with business evolved in such cities as Detroit (Archer) and Cleveland (White). Where blacks had once been the starting point for liberal coalitions, black votes in many big cities declined significantly as a percentage of the total vote (Meyerson, 1998). It became easier politically to depose black city school boards and central education district leaders. Consequently, the focus of some big city mayors has changed from providing municipal employment to improving student test scores. Hence the broad coalition of

generally Democratic voters — including poor people, unions, school employees. neighborhoods, and civic reformers — has been weakened (Meyerson, 1998). Into this vacuum have stepped Republican mayors in New York and Los Angeles who have pressured the school boards to appoint different central education administrators.

While Chicago and Boston are held up as examples of mayoral takeover, it is important to recognize that both cities have long had strong mayors, and have not relied on more “apolitical” city managers. As well, the public schools were never as separate from these city governments as was the case elsewhere, or as Progressive Era reformers would have liked. Both districts have historically been fiscally dependent on city government, and this fiscal dependence has often provided a justification for mayoral involvement in Boston and Chicago school issues. Chicago is among the minority of cities that has never had an elected school board, and thus the district has never been fully separated from city politics. Boston’s mayor has historically influenced the total spending of the Boston Public Schools, but not the spending priorities of the elected School Committee. In addition, the role of the courts in Boston during the desegregation era limited the influence of the School Committee. Nevertheless, Chicago and Boston leaders did follow the ideals of progressive reformers in creating large professional bureaucracies using civil service-type exams and classifications. Benjamin Willis, the General Superintendent of Schools in Chicago in the 1960's, was a model of the professional education CEO (Cuban, 1976).

A contributing factor to a climate for reform in both cities was a very active civic elite, particularly as represented by a business community with a history of involvement with public education reform. According to Shipps, in her article in this volume, “Chicago’s new regime is the consequence of long simmering frustrations with the performance of the

Chicago Public Schools... coupled with an extraordinarily engaged and active civic elite.” The Vault in Boston and the Commercial Club in Chicago were, and continue to be, powerful city organizations comprised primarily of leaders of large businesses. In Chicago, the Commercial Club was intricately connected to the education system, and the role of this dominating organization is closely tied to the business community’s role in the fiscal matters of the city’s public schools. The history of a strong business role in education is much longer in Chicago than in Boston, where the Vault become more active in the 1980s.

### *Contextual Factors*

General trends in recent years, including a growing frustration with bureaucratic structures and a diminishing faith governance structure, including elected school boards, have encouraged policy makers in a number of cities and states to consider enhanced mayoral control over education. However, there are also local reasons for interest in this type of reform. For example, some of the specific issues that the 1995 structural changes in Chicago were designed to address arose out of the recent 1988 education reform which granted considerable powers to Local School Councils (LSC’s) comprised of teachers, parents and community members. The decentralized nature of the 1988 reform, combined with prior governance changes, created a system in which there were many levels of political accountability, and no clear ultimate responsibility. This fragmented system created a situation in which the School Finance Authority, LSC’s, the school board and the mayor were all in some way accountable for the successes and failures of the Chicago Public Schools.

Other issues combined with those directly related to governance in creating an environment in each city where policymakers were willing to make substantial structural alterations. Both cities, but especially Chicago, were plagued by continual fiscal problems in the school district. In Chicago, regular cost overruns and the difficulty of raising money through bonds contributed to a series of fiscal crises that required the business community to help bail out the school system. These budget problems were very public and contentious. While the Boston Public Schools' financial woes were not as dramatic as in Chicago, by the late 1980s, the district's steadily rising budgets were causing concern among city leaders (especially the mayor) who were also having to contend with cuts in state aid due to the state's financial difficulties. Related in part to budget issues were on-going labor problems in both school districts, especially between the school system and the teachers unions. Labor disputes had been a continual problem in Chicago since the late 1960s, and strikes were not an unusual response. Bitter contract negotiations were also common in Boston.

### ***Why mayors wanted control***

The growing problems in urban education and the increased pressures placed on urban governance created a crisis situation in many cities, leading the public and policy makers to demand a major overhaul. In the past, mayors avoided the political tangle of education, but this has become more difficult in the current climate that focuses on the role of education in a city's overall health. Cibulka argues that mayors can no longer avoid school-related issues politically, because of the increasing view among business leaders and others that schools are a critical piece of urban economic development (1997). In addition to an interest by mayors in using education as a part of a broader urban improvement plan, there

are financial incentives for mayors to become more involved with education. As Cibulka notes, "Increasingly tight city budgets also place pressure on mayors to keep taxes down. Schools consume a large portion of that tax dollar, and in some cities the mayor has little direct control over decisions made by urban school officials" (Cibulka, 1997, p. 322). Thus, there are both ideological and budgetary reasons for mayors to seek greater control over their city's system of public education.

Current mayors such as Daly, Menino, and White have received support at both the city and state level — support that was critical in order for them to assert more control over education. One reason they received this support was due to the belief that highly visible mayors are more likely to be held accountable by voters for the state of public education than relatively unknown school board members. Political integration, with mayors at the head of urban governance, "is premised on the notion that the policy works most effectively where there are clear and direct lines of accountability from public elected officials to the public. This is achieved by having fewer officials to elect and only one set of elections" (Cibulka, 1997, p. 322). In addition to policy reasons, such as greater accountability, city and state politicians have political motivations for removing control over education from a publicly elected local school board that they can not direct to a mayor over whom they may have some influence.

### **THE "NEW IMPROVED" MAYOR GAINS CONTROL**

The impetus for turning to mayors to solve problems in urban education systems stems in part from the belief that there is a "new breed" of mayor that can improve education and avoid past mistakes. The new improved mayor is:

largely about managing city government efficiently in the public interest rather than using it as a mechanism for arbitrating competing interest groups . . . They have an ideology: that cities can dramatically alleviate seemingly endemic urban afflictions without a massive redistribution of wealth, that the way to achieve this is by using competition to make city services radically more efficient . . . (Beinert, 1997, p. 16).

These "new" mayors have formed an informal network and symbolize a radical break with their predecessors. Some of these mayors include Daly (Chicago), Rendell (Philadelphia), White (Cleveland), Goldsmith (Indianapolis), Riordan (Los Angeles), Giuliani (New York), and Norquist (Milwaukee). These mayors allegedly realize that in a tight budgetary climate more city jobs to pay off constituencies will not work, so part of the answer is to privatize and contract out services. They are a marked contrast to the old style "civil rights" mayors of the 1970-1990 era:

While calling for dramatic change nationally, the civil rights mayors preserved the status quo at home — appeasing the municipal employee unions with generous contracts, using city jobs to cement their coalitions and leaving education, that most intractable and politically dangerous of problems, to elected school boards (Beinert, 1997, p. 20).

Beinert suggests that changes in the urban environment discussed earlier — including the decline in federal aid, disintegration of the civil rights coalition, and new coalitions that include Hispanics and immigrants with less electoral reliance on blacks — can help to explain big changes in mayoral behavior and ambitions. New policies have caused these reform mayors to become estranged from their political parties who cling to

older paradigms. For example, Daly's 1995 takeover of Chicago schools would not have happened if the opposite party Republicans who supported him did not control both Illinois state houses in 1995. These mayors appeared willing to confront strong interests on both sides of the political fence, including teacher unions, civil rights leaders, and the Christian Coalition. The new mayors speak the language of modern public management: reinvention, innovation, privatization, competition, strategic planning, and productivity (Eisinger, 1997). They hope these concepts will enable them to make the most of the dwindling resources that they control, and that privatization will provide better services. Mayors like Daly in Chicago and Menino in Boston use their sophisticated media skills and staff to reiterate these new public management approaches, and contrast them to fractious school boards.

In sum, mayoral takeover or an increased role for mayors in schools is justified by proponents as providing a single point of electoral accountability, more integration of children services with schools, and a better pupil attainment. Such developments will spur city economic development, stimulate more middle class people to live in cities, and forge a closer alliance between city government and businesses. Political losers in this shift will be the central school district professionals and the school board. Opponents assert that a school board appointed by the mayor will result in less democracy because the voters will have fewer electoral choices, and cannot vote for a board member from their section of the city.

### **FORMS OF ENHANCED MAYORAL PARTICIPATION**

While mayoral takeover has garnered most media attention, there are several forms of mayoral influence. Chicago is the most extreme form of mayor impact. Mayor Daly installed his trusted employees as Chair of the School Board and Superintendent, as well as moving about 100 of his office staff to takeover key functions such as personnel and contracting. Mayor Menino picked a new superintendent and made him part of the mayor's cabinet, but did not transfer any of his own office staff to takeover key operational units of the school system. Mayor Archer in Detroit appointed a new school board, but the board appointed the superintendent who has prerogatives invested in his office that cannot be overturned by the Detroit board. Moreover, the one Detroit member appointed by Michigan Governor Engler vetoed the board's first choice for superintendent. Oakland Mayor, Jerry Brown, led a successful city charter amendment to appoint three added members from the city at large to the current seven-member board.

But other mayors have relied primarily upon backing a slate with endorsements, financial support, and campaign workers. Mayor Serna of Sacramento and Riordan of Los Angeles were successful in electing their slates that led quickly to the replacement of the superintendent. Mayor Riordan, who raised \$2 million for his slate, plays an active role in discussions about where to build schools, and in teacher union elections of their leadership. In November 1999, Philadelphia voters passed a referendum to allow the mayor to appoint all board members at one time. In June 2000, Mayor Street of Philadelphia negotiated a new finance plan with Pennsylvania Governor Ridge that led to the resignation of Superintendent David Hornbeck. Mayors have integrated city services more closely to the schools. For example, Mayor Gonzalez of San Jose, CA helped to provide subsidized housing for teachers. Mayors have linked city services for children, transportation, safety,

museums, and community development organizations more closely to schools (Finn Jr. & Petrilli, 1999). The Republican Mayor of Jersey City advocates vouchers for the city schools, but has not been successful in passing it.

Some observers of the switch to mayoral control have suggested that this institutional change is not a panacea for education problems, and is unlikely to improve education. Skeptical education administrators point to mayoral control of schools in Baltimore, where the mayor never lost much influence over schools as a result of Progressive Era reforms. Richard Hunter, a former Baltimore superintendent who has served in a number of cities, observed:

The best way to gain the [mayor's] support is to do something for the mayor: contribute to the campaign fund; work on the re-election effort; deliver votes or support from a constituency; or convince the mayor his or her support of your project will attract political advantage, positive media publicity, or additional campaign contributions. In short, you must help keep the mayor in office. When public education becomes part of the political process, education policy decisions become commodities bought, sold, bartered, and bestowed like patronage positions and building permits (Hunter, 1997, p. 219).

Hunter believes that the spread of interest in mayoral control stems from "scape-goating educators" that began with the National Commission on Education Excellence in 1983 and the efforts to placate insistent business leaders in 1985. Hunter and others stress that control by the Baltimore mayor, where mayoral control of schools has always been the case, has not resulted in better school performance. In 1997, the Maryland legislature reduced the power of the mayor, creating a CEO appointed by a "New Board of School

Commissioners" appointed jointly by the mayor and governor from a list submitted by the State Board of Education. This new CEO can change the Baltimore school personnel system. In Baltimore, "political control of the schools [by the mayor] has not proven to be a panacea" (Cibulka, 1997, p. 322).

Critics of mayoral control contend that the use of contracts by mayors for services like building repairs will lead to machine politics whereby school contracts are traded for campaign contributions to the mayor. The idea of a "new breed of mayor" does not carry much weight with these critics. Despite these concerns, favorable publicity about Boston and Chicago under mayoral control has led state politicians and other mayors to think more about mayoral takeover (Newton, 1997). In Los Angeles, Mayor Riordan formed his own slate of candidates to overthrow the incumbent school board. This new board appointed former Colorado Governor Roy Romer as Superintendent. In Milwaukee, Mayor Norquist led a movement to allow the city to establish charter schools.

However, some mayors stress that the mayor's capacity to change schools is politically risky if there is no prerogative for the mayor to appoint the board. As Mayor Stephen Goldsmith observed:

I don't mind tilting at windmills, but I like to win every now and then. It's funny: the best thing for my career is to be Pollyannaish. The more I agitate for change at Indianapolis Public Schools, the more I get blamed for the problems. (Grunwald, 1998).

## **WHAT HAS MAYORAL CONTROL IN BOSTON AND CHICAGO DONE?**

In both Boston and Chicago, new powers granted to mayors quickly resulted in fundamental changes in the governance of these large urban education systems. In this section, we explore two central issues. First, what are some of the basic differences in the directions taken in these two cities? Secondly, why have these different outcomes resulted from similar structural changes?

### ***Governance Change in Boston and Chicago***

As a result of the factors discussed earlier, and other political and historical issues, formal governance changes enhancing the role of the mayor were introduced in Boston and Chicago in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Boston, a series of decisions between 1989 and 1996, both legislative and electoral, gave the mayor the power to appoint the School Committee. Up until this time, the School Committee had been directly elected in some form. This change gave the mayor a much stronger role in the operations of the school system, and created a direct line of authority to him.

Mayor Flynn in Boston spearheaded the charge to alter the governance structure of the Boston Public Schools. He was supported by the state legislature, which was becoming increasingly concerned with the Boston schools, and by the business community. Much of the African-American community was skeptical of eliminating an elected School Committee, and the Irish of South Boston (who had long held power on the elected committee) also opposed the change.

In Chicago, the governance changes of 1995 granting an enhanced role to the mayor were layered over earlier reforms instituted in 1988. The 1988 reform, which was supported by state Democrats and civic activists, shifted power from the district towards

Local School Councils (LSC's). In this legislative change, the mayor's ability to appoint the city's school board was decreased. However, the impetus for this decentralization was not a desire to increase the influence of educators. Rather, Shipps argues, it was designed to enhance the influence of parents and community members; she comments that, "Educators were blamed for the problems and their discretion curtailed."

While the 1988 reforms pushed control towards the school-site, the legislation passed in 1995 shifted power up the ladder to the mayor. Although Chicago Mayor Daly favored this shift, he did not pursue it publicly as Mayor Flynn had. Instead, the 1995 reform was a Republican legislator-led governance change that emphasized centralizing political accountability. It was placed over the structure of the 1988 reform, rather than replacing it.

These changes gave the Chicago mayor "more authority than any mayor since before the Progressive Era... effectively turning the [public education] system into a department of city government" (Shipps, in this volume). Specifically, the legislation in 1995 eliminated the school board nominating committee, which had effectively minimized the mayor's ability to select school board members, and replaced the traditional board with a new corporate style one. In this new structure, only one member of five was to be focused on education (the Chief Education Officer) and there was a CEO, rather than a superintendent. The legislation also limited the rights of the unions to strike was temporarily curtailed, and a large number of issues that had been bargained in the past were defined as non-bargainable issues. State legislation enabled Chicago to contract out many more building repairs, services, and purchases, rather than using the numerous unions within the old system.

In both cities, the primary initiators of the governance changes that granted more power to the mayors were the business community, the mayor (especially in Boston) and state legislators. Local groups, such as community activists and minority group representatives, were not directly involved, and educator organizations including the teacher unions were also peripheral to the debates or opposed the change.

While the goals of those who pushed through the governance changes in Boston and Chicago had certain similarities, especially the desire to improve accountability, there were also some important differences. In Chicago, there was a strong emphasis on improving the efficiency of the public schools – particularly the fiscal efficiency of the district. As Shipps notes, the 1995 governance changes were “a continuation of a longstanding effort to improve efficiency and restructure accountability.” This emphasis reflected the interests of the business community. While improved efficiency was also a factor in Boston, it was not nearly as central to the discussion.

Another difference between the reforms in these two cities involved the role and purpose of the district’s “leader.” Reflecting the focus on efficiency, the Chicago Public Schools were to be led by a business-style CEO, rather than a traditional superintendent. In Boston, on the other hand, Flynn explicitly wanted a strong educator-leader at the head of the school system. While Mayor Flynn wanted to be held accountable for the state of the Boston Public Schools, he claimed he was not interested in being directly involved with the district’s operations. Rather, he sought to place a strong superintendent in charge of the district – a superintendent who would not have to contend with the many demands of an elected School Committee. The intentions of those who initiated the governance changes in Chicago and Boston were reflected in the implementation of these changes, and

especially in the interests and styles of the new leaders chosen with the input of their city's mayors.

Finally, the view of city and state leaders about the capacity of educators to reform education was rather different. In Chicago, there was continual skepticism about the ability (and motivation) of educators in improving schools – both the 1988 reforms that shifted power towards parents and community members, and the 1995 reforms that granted additional power to the mayor moved control away from educators. While Boston leaders shared some of these concerns, they were still interested in vesting considerable authority in public education professionals.

### ***Similar Change, Different Directions***

The governance changes that shifted power towards the mayors in Chicago and Boston only set the stage for the substantial shifts in these two school systems. The mayors themselves, and the individuals whom they helped to select as the leaders of these districts, took advantage of structural changes to implement substantive reforms. In Chicago, Paul Vallas, a former budget director for the city, moved to the new position of CEO of the Chicago Public Schools. The selection of Vallas reflected the business community's interests in having someone from outside of traditional public education at the helm of the city's schools. Vallas believed that clear accountability combined with a district run more like a business would lead to an improved organization. In this top-down change model, management creates a vision and defines clear sanctions for individuals and schools who do not make progress towards that vision.

Superintendent Tom Payzant in Boston was a much more traditional choice for a district leader, and his selection reflected the mayor's interest in having a professional educator who would stay away (at least to some extent) from the political issues that had consumed much of the time of previous superintendents. Payzant's approach was much more within the framework of traditional education reform, and his primary focus reflected a professional education model involving higher standards and capacity building.

The changes that resulted from the combination of a new governance structure in each city, and mayors and school system leaders who sought to alter these districts, also reflect some of the differences in the intentions of those who sought governance change. In each city, there were shifts in both the practical/governance aspect of the district, and in the overall message about teaching and learning sent by the mayor and superintendent/CEO.

In Chicago, some very visible and practical changes occurred in the first years following the 1995 reform. For example, for the first time in years, the school district's budget appeared to be in reasonable shape. (However, part of this change may be due to Mayor Daly's willingness to support the school system through property tax increases, and money from other parts of the city budget.) In addition, for the first time in years, there was relative labor peace in the Chicago public schools, and the pattern of teacher strikes was broken.

At the district central office, there were also some major changes following Vallas' arrival. City employees were placed immediately in the key budget, personnel, and facilities positions. The leadership of the district, in addition to Vallas, came partially from the business sector, rather than from education. This new administrative team has repaired schools, begun professional development for principals, expanded preschool and after-

school programs, ended social promotion, and put a quarter of the elementary schools on probation.

While LSC's (created through the 1998 reform) continued to exist at all the Chicago public schools, their influence was reduced, and the new central office leaders increased their own role in the functioning of the city's schools. But the LSC's still appoint the school principal, and:

principals continue to act with more freedom and control of resources than ever before. In elementary schools, this change has been accompanied by a broad-based gradual increase in achievement. (Sebring & Bryk, 2000, p. 105)

The combination of no budget crises, no strikes, and a generally positive view among the public of the reforms that Vallas instituted appears to have improved the general public perception of the school system during this period.

The direct impact of the governance changes in Boston on the actual governance structure of the public schools was not as marked as in Chicago. The most notable change was the elimination of the bitter battles within the School Committee and between the Committee and the mayor – a logical outcome of having the School Committee appointed rather than elected. The committee included allies first of Mayor Flynn, then of Mayor Menino, and many members had close connections with the business community. As in Chicago, labor relations, particularly with the teachers union, improved in the years following the governance change. Also similar to Chicago, some of the most blatant budget problems disappeared in Boston. While the Boston mayor has always influenced

the amount of money spent by the public school system, these changes allowed him to also impact how those dollars are spent. Unlike in Chicago, however, there were no dramatic changes in the structure or staffing of the district's central office, and no transfer of city employees to key positions in the school system central office.

The style and substance of the education reforms that were put into place during this period, in the context of these governance changes, were quite different in the two cities. In Chicago, the initial focus was on accountability, defined largely as success on test scores, and taking action with schools and students that do not meet predefined goals. According to Shipps, there was been an emphasis on “strong and immediate sanctions,” for principals whose schools don't meet Vallas' performance goals. This is especially true for schools whose students fell into the bottom 25% in test scores within the district – these schools faced such high-stakes consequences as probation and reconstitution. The 1995 state mayor takeover law removed some bargained items from the teacher contract, and allowed the superintendent to terminate teachers on short notice in reconstituted schools.

For students, there were also new and high-stakes repercussions for low test scores. The most public example of this involved Vallas' call for an end to social promotion (which was put into place following the conclusion of this study). Vallas has met with some success in terms of test scores, as there was an increase in ITBS scores soon after he began his new program. It is unclear, however, exactly what is responsible for this improvement.

While these accountability measures generally focused on minimal standards, and raising the educational outcomes of students faring the worst in the city's schools, there were also changes for those students at the upper end of the performance spectrum. For

example, Vallas supported the creation and expansion of alternatives such as magnet schools, accelerated programs such as International Baccalaureate options and charter schools. Alongside efforts to remove “troublesome or slow-learning students” from regular public schools to other settings such as transition centers and alternative high schools, there was a push for more “upper-end” options is linked with the goal of bringing middle-class families back into the Chicago Public Schools.

One hope for increased mayoral control of schools was that mayors would be more able to link together currently fragmented programs designed to support students and families (Kirst & McLaughlin, 1990). In Chicago, Daly and Vallas were able to help schools through support from a variety of other city agencies. As well, Vallas pushed the expansion of after-school programs that have been well-received publicly. In the past two years Chicago reform scope has expanded and now encompasses much more than its initial foci. Vallas has aggressively utilized the takeover legislative permission to contract out services and purchases, rather than go through one of over 20 unions within the school system.

Vallas has pursued instructional improvement through highly structured lesson plans and less capacity building than Boston. Vallas stresses that in a system where one out of every four students changes schools, consistency is crucial. A team of 100 Chicago teachers developed the plans for 30,000 teachers. The lesson plans are very specific for each daily topic, but successful implementation will depend in part on how well principals provide support. The style of the education reforms being undertaken in Boston, while arising out of a similar governance change, is quite different than in Chicago. Although Mayor Flynn and Superintendent Harrison-Jones were the first leaders to experience the

mayorally-appointed School Committee, the major changes can be seen as largely resulting from the actions of Mayor Menino and Superintendent Payzant. In contrast to Vallas, who came in as an education outsider, Payzant was very much the professional superintendent who sought to work primarily within the existing structures. While Vallas relied heavily on the existing capacity of the school system, Payzant's plans focused on increasing capacity. According to Yee, "Payzant emphasized his long term commitment to steady, resolute progress through staff training, new materials, and high standards". A big question is whether this long-term change strategy will produce enough results to buffer it from political opposition.

Some of the methods Payzant used included raising standards, leadership development, whole-school change, and creating a Reorganization Plan focused on student performance (Hill, Campbell, & Harvey, 2000). His focus on teaching and learning issues involved relying to some extent on professional norms as a means to increased performance, rather than sanctions. Unlike Chicago, there was little change in the tenure of administrators or teachers in Boston, and no talk of reconstitution or making major changes in the teacher contract. Initially, Payzant introduced school report cards that included results on the Stanford-9. Currently, Boston is focusing on the new state assessment, called MCAS. Payzant has used funds from Annenberg Foundation to implement an elaborate instructional change strategy including school-site coaches, joint teacher planning time, literary specialists, formative assessment, school quality reviews, and district resource action teams. High performing schools get autonomy similar to charter schools. Payzant has merged statewide standards expectations with a \$10 million Annenberg grant

that helps schools choose and implement instructional strategies that will help meet the state standards.

### **THE FUTURE OF MAYORAL CONTROL**

The new reliance on mayors as the primary elected official overseeing a city's education system may result in changes in the effectiveness and efficiency of the involved urban school districts. However, it is always difficult to predict the outcome of governance changes. The effects of such changes involve an ongoing pattern of interpretations of those effects by different actors, actions taken based on those interpretations, and new political stresses resulting from those ensuing actions. Inevitably, this feedback process leads to yet more and new demands being placed on the administrators and creators of the governance change (Wirt & Kirst, 1972). The theory underlying the shift to mayoral control may be reinforced through this feedback process, or the institutional change may lead in unexpected directions. Mayor Daly's school control was re-authorized in 1999 by the Illinois legislature without significant opposition. Boston voters, by a 70% majority, approved extension of mayoral control in 1996.

Some literature on institutional change suggests that efforts to change institutions often lead but to permutations of the institutions that previously existed (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; March & Olsen, 1989). This literature suggests that mayorally-controlled schools may well end up operating in a similar manner to the institutional structures that they replaced, thereby demonstrating some of the "problematic" aspects of the pre-existing system (such as bureaucratic dysfunctions). Hence, the need to keep reforming older "reforms."

Mayor takeover can lead to a more coherent education system at the central office level, reduce some of the conflict caused by fragmentation, and stabilize the budget (Wong, 1999). Greater coherence can improve the public image of the school system and provide more favorable media coverage. Policy changes will reflect the preferences of the newly empowered actors through mayoral takeover, rather than any essence of the structural reforms themselves. Mayors in Chicago and Boston have addressed classroom instruction, and not merely focused on fiscal issues. A potential downside of mayoral takeover is the minimized voice of dissenters. Without the possibility of gaining influence through an elected board of city council, those who disagree with the mayor's preferences have less access to forums in which to voice their displeasure and change policy.

A key issue is whether mayoral control can improve classroom instruction and the every day lives of teachers and children. Historically, governance change has not had much effect on classrooms, but Chicago and Boston demonstrate the crucial differential impact of local context for school improvement strategies (Tyack & Cuban, 1997). Mayor Daly focused initially upon daily lesson plans and schools and students that score very low on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Mayor Menino in Boston opted for a strategy that gives high priority to staff development. An interesting political development in several cities is the effective role mayors have played in negotiating with governors and the White House. Mayors have more access and influence at these top levels of government than school superintendents.

Whatever its impact, there are political and geographic limits to the spread of mayoral control. Many cities are not contiguous with school districts — San Jose, California has 20 school districts within its city boundary, and southern cities are part of county school

districts. But city test scores in many cities have not risen sufficiently to offset state and local dissatisfaction, nor created large scale changes in bureaucratic standard operating procedures. More efforts at mayoral takeovers are possible. And, if the mayors do not succeed in cities like Chicago, Boston, and Cleveland, voucher advocates will have a stronger case — at least for the worst performing big city schools.

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